



ACHIM SZEPANSKI 2019-11-22

## ON THE QUESTION OF THE GENERAL PURPOSE OF THE STATE (POULANTZAS, PASCHUKANIS, VOGL, ETC.)

GENERICSCIENCE ALTHUSSER, DELEUZE/GUATTARI, POULANTZAS, STAATSAPPARAT, STAATSTHEORIE

In modern international law, territory, state power and population are generally regarded as important components of the sovereign nation-state. In the Marxist theoretical tradition inspired by structuralism, Nicos Poulantzas, following and in contrast to Louis Althusser's analyses of the ideological state apparatuses (Althusser 1977), described the state somewhat more elaborately as "the material condensation of a power relationship between classes and class fractions, which always expresses itself in specific form in the state" (Poulantzas 1978:119). The primacy in this definition lies in the class struggles, the social power relations and their transformations, and finally the positions of the social agents within the framework of the organization and reproduction of the production relations, which for Poulantzas are characterized in particular by the separation of intellectual and manual labor. It can be said very briefly that Poulantzas in his state theory examines the complex interplay between the division of labor materialized in the relations of production and the state within a concrete social formation that is constituted in the last instance by social forces and relations of forces. Precisely because of its relative separation from the economy, the state as the ensemble of ideological, repressive and economic state apparatuses can provide the conditions that enable the ruling classes and class fractions to constitute themselves as a "block in power" within which one or more factions succeed in presenting particular interests as general and hegemonic interests. (Ibid.: 239)<sup>1</sup>

Poulantzas thus attempts, in unison with Pierre Bourdieu's analyses of the state (Bourdieu 2014), at least as far as the direction of thrust is concerned, to reject functionalist concepts of the state, which define the state purely in terms of its functions, by defining the functions themselves as contested state fields. Poulantzas differs, firstly, from juridical state concepts that define the state in terms of law (sovereignty, territory, constitution, separation of powers, legal property, etc.), secondly, instrumentalist positions that grasp the state either as a neutral tool or as an instrument of the economically ruling classes, thirdly, economicist views that regard the state as an expression or purely as a transmission mechanism of economic regularities, and fourthly, formal analytical theories that take the state out of the capitalist sphere of circulation or the capitalist class. derive from the market mechanisms guaranteeing formal freedom and equality (actors concluding treaties) or from capital structures in order to emphasize the cohesion function of the state for the economy, while at the same time, according to Poulantzas at least, the class struggles and power relations would be downstream or conceived as purely contingent.

Poulantzas describes the foundation of the power relations in the state apparatuses with the concept of condensation, which for him indicates that the power relations are permeated by hierarchical divisions (of the social forces) that solidify in specific discursive-material arrangements and thus inscribe themselves in the state apparatuses. For Poulantzas, the apparatus that materializes the compression of the balance of power is based on a specific summary, institutionalization, and bundling of material practices. These practices traverse all areas of the state, i.e. they take place in and between the various state apparatuses, whereby they experience a specific density and relevance, which means nothing more than that the practices, which either stand in opposition to one another or are blended into compromises, must find very specific material arrangements in the state.<sup>2</sup> This means that the configuration of the state apparatuses has material structural principles, such as mechanisms of "structural selectivity" (Offe 1975: 65f.), which block access to the apparatuses for the subclasses, bureaucratic administrative logics such as "priority termination", which is reflected in the organizational structure and weighting of the various state apparatuses, and finally the "filtering" of interests (there are various political options, but only certain measures are implemented). (Poulantzas 1978: 165f.)<sup>3</sup> Depending on the problems involved, complexes of measures are set in motion that are much less conflictual today than Poulantzas had assumed, however, but remain within the problem horizon of a technocratic elite, thus once again proving that the state is not a neutral terrain equally accessible to all social forces. Thus, the state is by no means a neutral arrangement, but is far more receptive to capital interests than to workers' interests, whereby this kind of relationality must be permanently reproduced in the state.

Material condensation" is a specific term that is intended to substantiate the constitution, reproduction and transformation of the capitalist state in its materiality. In addition, it serves to grasp the state as a strategic process and to relate state power to the power relations and strategies of social forces and classes, in order then to analyze precisely how exactly the processes of the constitution of state power take place, out of which interests social forces and classes (starting from their position in the social division of labor) use political strategies and tactics against other forces by means of certain power techniques, how these processes inscribe themselves in the structures and policies of apparatuses and in the unity of the state and what effects this has on the structure and the forms of practice within the power bloc, on the relations between the power bloc and subaltern classes and on the unstable compromise equilibrium between the classes. (Cf. Gallas 2016)

Ultimately, Poulantzas sees the state as the (relatively autonomous, non-reflective) reproduction of the division of labor within capitalist production relations, in a concrete social formation.<sup>4</sup> The capitalist division of labor, whose adequate form Poulantzas sees in Taylorism, on the one hand creates parcelled, atomized cells and units, while on the other hand the space-time matrix is designed serially, cumulatively, continuously, and homogeneously, and is most clearly visible in assembly line production. (Poulantzas 1978: 57) With such statements, Poulantzas refers both the law and the institutional structure of the state apparatuses more or less directly to the conditions of production, which are characterized, on the one hand, by the individualization of the producers and, on the other hand, by the synthesis of labor (social division of labor or labor-organizational effects of the production process in large industry). It is easy to see that this leads to an analogization of the empirical determinations of the production process, which is subsumed under capital, and of the legal and organizational forms of state apparatuses. Although the view of the relative autonomy of the state does not only imply the connecting moment of the state to the conditions of production, Poulantzas ultimately more or less presupposes the relative autonomy of the state without explicating it more precisely. At least Poulantzas vehemently opposes attempts to justify the determination of the relative autonomy of the state, which are to be added to the so-called debate on the derivation of the state, because their determination of the circulation/exchange relation as the first reference for the derivation of the legal and state form makes the inclusion of the class character of production relations in political theory impossible. At this point, Poulantzas can be accused, quite independently of the validity of the arguments put forward in the debate on the derivation of the state, of not possessing a logical concept of capital himself and therefore of simply overemphasizing the significance of class struggles, which seem to be constitutive for capital; one can even say that he gives the struggles a strangely rational, even natural foundation and makes them a driving force without justification. Moreover, since it does not define the relationship between circulation and production more precisely and focuses the configuration of the relationship between state and economy on the reproduction of the division of labor in the relations of production by the state, the inner connection between circulation and production in the form of capital is not grasped, or, to put it another way, on the one hand circulation cannot be understood as that of capital, while on the other hand the relationship between economy and state remains unclear.<sup>5</sup>

If we stick briefly to the concepts coined by Althusser, the form analytical state theories treat the state not at the level of the concrete formation of society, but more generally at the level of the mode of production. The attempt to generally define the state in its basic features from the point of view of circulation has a direct reference to the new German critique of values, a specific reception of Marx's analysis of the value form that developed after the events of May 1968 (Blanke, among others, 1974). However, long before this, the Russian legal theorist Paschukanis in 1923 had raised the originally Marxian question as to why the content had to take on a form in order to concretize the question as to why the class rule of capital actually requires the form of an extra-economic apparatus of state power governing by means of abstract general laws. Paschukanis writes: "Why does it take the form of official state rule, or – what is the same – why is the apparatus of state coercion not created as the private apparatus of the ruling class, why does it separate itself from the latter and take the form of an impersonal apparatus of public power detached from society?" (Paschukanis 2003: 116) To cut a long story short, the general formal provisions of the capitalist state (state power by means of public authority) are explained by Paschukanis as a necessary implication of the legal principles already laid down in

the exchange of goods (between formally free owners of goods). The explanatory reference to the (capitalist) exchange of goods is the characteristic feature of this legal and state-theoretical position, or in other words, the sphere of circulation, which is by no means understood as an illusion but as a real form of the material reproduction of capital (and thus as a component of the relations of production) constituted by exchange, is here the starting point for determining the form of state.

The connection between value form/goods form and form of state is thus mediated via the legal form. According to the theorists, the value relation/form of goods exists as a constitutive economic form independent of the will of human beings (Blanke, et al. 1974: 70), but at the same time it requires the common consent of the owners of the goods so that they can relate their products to one another as goods at all. The form of goods thus implies a specific social relationship between people, since the goods "do not themselves go to markets". (MEW 23: 99). There must therefore be an adequate form that allows the isolated private owners to be linked together as subjects. To this end, the owners of the goods must recognize each other as free and equal private owners of their products and express this in a mutually binding agreement of will. For this, they in turn need the contract, which is thus regarded as the "original legal figure" (Blanke, et al.: 71). And this entails a real abstraction: just as the exchange is abstracted from the utility value, so it is also abstracted from the concrete individuals, whereby on the one hand the value form and on the other hand formally free and equal legal subjects are conceivable. If it can then be said with Marx that the legal content determines the legal form, then this content, which can be identified as an economic relationship, itself has a specific legal form: the content, which concerns the socially necessary, abstract work, must not only find an economic form (value form), but also a legal form, which is necessarily reproduced consciously or unconsciously in the cognitive structures of the actors.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, in order to think of the state, the abstract legal form must be codified in the state as legislative ("substantive legal certainty") and guaranteed as executive ("enforcement certainty").<sup>7</sup> However, the enforcement of the law presupposes that the state succeeds in monopolizing the power beyond the sphere of disposal of private owners of goods – although the legal forms are a necessarily immanent condition for the exchange of goods, but in order to produce effects they must also be able to be enforced with coercion, especially in the case of conflict, so that an instance monopolizing the instruments of repression, namely the state, is the condition for the legal relationships and thus at the same time for the regulated exchange of goods. The state monopoly on the use of force to enforce the law is thus a constitutive moment of the state, which in its relative separation from production always sets conditions for a reasonably smooth reproduction of capitalist accumulation.

In the state derivation theory, the general law functions as a state formal principle that is adequate to the legal relationships that have ever been related to circulation, in which the individuals behave towards one another as formally free and equal representatives of the goods. This legal and impersonal procedure marks abstract equality insofar as its effect cannot be any other than an effect equal for all. In the debates on the derivation of the state, however, the imaginary dimension of political ideas propagating freedom, equality and justice is already forgotten here, because the circulation of a special commodity, namely that of labor, does not come into view. It is the imaginary identification of (value-adding) work and equivalently exchanged labor power that, in genetic terms, makes the production of imaginary political ideas. It is then indeed the economic sphere of circulation, namely the sale and purchase of labor (which appears as the sale and purchase of labor), that causes the political ideas of freedom and equality.

Due to a salto mortale, one can also call it "dialectical coupling" of production and circulation (which is represented as a relationship of coexistence or causality or optionally as a functional context), the rule of law is still designated by the derivation theorists as a class state: For example, the "dialectical coupling" conveys the freedom/equality of the actors at the level of circulation and the lack of freedom/equality at the level of production (class society: ownership of means of production by the capitalists, while the workers freed from it possess nothing but their labor force). And thus the capitalist state has a double existence, namely as a right-wing and class state, as a state that, in addition to its function as a rule of law, with which it guarantees the formally free and equal legal subject, at the same time secures the reproduction of capital. (Ibid.: 72f.)

Now, however, it becomes apparent that the theory of state derivation, which primarily capers itself to the commodity and value form, separates circulation and production from one another (as does Poulantzas, albeit by other modes of justification), at least mediation remains vague precisely because one uses a shortened concept of circulation oneself (namely merely the circulation of commodities). This means that commodification is ever coupled to the production and capitalization of added value, and if discussions about the form of goods, commodification or the market do not raise the question of added value/capital, they are to be rejected from a Marxist perspective. And if the state also has an interest in itself with regard to its apparatuses and its personnel, then this means that the capitalist state, which is sui generis a tax state, is structurally dependent on the production of a surplus in the capitalist accumulation process.

Let us briefly explain why the theories of state derivation have a completely abbreviated concept of circulation. In Capital Volume 2, Marx starts from three cycles of industrial capital, namely money capital, productive capital (constant and variable capital) and commodity capital, whereby he captures the entire cycle of capital, in which that of money capital is included, in the process formula  $G - W (PM, AK) \dots P \dots W' - G'$ . In addition to the production time (P), this cycle comprises two phases of circulation, namely the preparation time (G-W) and the realization time (W-G). In terms of time, Marx calls the entire process the turnaround time. However, Marx uses the term circulation not only for the two phases of buying and selling goods, but also for the entire duration of the capital turnover, which thus also includes production. Marx then speaks of the total circulation time of a given capital. (MEW 24: 154) The entire cycle of capital is the cycle of money capital, insofar as it structures, represents and integrates

the cycle movements, more precisely the spiral movements of capital, as it also implies disturbances within the cycles, insofar as it itself functions as a center that shifts in each case. (MEW 24: 31ff.) This formula of monetary capital circulation is the primary mechanism of the capital economy, which constantly accompanies and includes the production of goods as production-for-profit and as production-for-circulation. Although money capital is also a moment of passage of the entire reproduction process of capital, as Marx notes (MEW 25: 406), once capitalization is set as the formation of fictitious capital, i.e. for Marx the most developed form of capital, any qualitative differences between the industrial and commercial individual capitals, their production processes and their goods, are erased in relation to it. Marx writes: "... And all capital is money capital in its expression of value". (ibid.: 406) Foreign or own money capital is the motor for industrial enterprises that buy goods (machines, buildings, energy, raw materials, software, etc.) and rent labor, so that products enriched with added value can be produced and also realized, so that new money capital can be formed. Machinery, energy, products or production processes are not capital in themselves. Marx has shown that the above formula is the decisive expression of all economic relations appropriate to capital, and that thereof course, this includes production, which functions as a purely functional process, a process for making profit. Capital ties the production process already to its monetary metamorphoses or to the (monetary) total circulation, i. e. production is to be understood as a function and phase of the circulation of capital (in the second comprehensive sense), the general form of which can be described in the following formula: G-W-P-W'-G:8

What does all this mean for the determination of the state? The power of the capitalist state consists precisely in the fact that it does not possess absolute autonomy and must therefore observe the axiomatics inherent in capital, which we have only briefly outlined here, and translate them into political power through its own apparatuses, and in this respect the state is to be understood precisely as relatively external to the mechanisms of capital accumulation, which are determined by the totality of processes of production and circulation, while he himself reproduces the economic-social relations in a specific way through his interventions and thus finds himself within the capital system, especially when he tries to cushion the consequences of the frictions and dynamics within the accumulation of capital, for example by inventing counter-trends against the fall of the profit rate or by absorbing superfluous capital through his kind of anti-production.

We must presuppose that the state, which is never given as such, is in latency as a form (virtual) and is thus given only as a concrete historical state, which, however, always makes it appear as the re-actualization of an abstract paradigm that shapes and realizes its own horizon. The form of state is thus always already there and is always born anew, re-updating an origin that never existed. This idealistic construction always refers anew to the ideal form of state, which is presupposed by the material conditions of the state, whereby the state as a form of state can only identify itself as the self-motion of its idea (Hegel) because it is incapable of localizing its emergence in time. (Cf. Sibertin-Blanc 2016: 19f.) Thus the form of state contains a double excess, namely that of its ideality (the self-motion of its concepts) and that of materiality, which is condensed in the historical apparatuses of appropriation of the state. Materialist state theory must proceed from the assumption that the state is primarily an apparatus of appropriation, which means that it must be asked why the accumulation of its economic existence qua taxes (not the accumulation of capital as flow and potency) assumes the objective form of the movement of the self-constitution of a body of power that appropriates a monopoly over what it occupies and distributes. The paranoid structure that is inscribed in the form of the state (it must always presuppose itself), lets us misjudge precisely that the state is an apparatus of appropriation, but also the impossibility of this appropriation, the latter, however, not with regard to the impossibility of the structure of self-presupposition (form of the state), but to the impossibility of being able to complete the self-presupposition without including that which constantly escapes it and challenges its completion, i.e. without recognizing on which it as a tax state always remains dependent, namely the economy. The generic factor of state decomposition in the form of self-referential state paranoia is the same as the historicization of the form of state, especially the capitalist tax state.

Since the 17th century, "good governance" has been regarded as economic governance that must be accompanied by a certain state rationality of discourses, justifications and procedures, with which the proto-capitalist state already identifies itself as a kind of enterprise that produces a specific field of intervention with which new objects such as the population, territories and nations are created, which above all are there to promote the general wealth of one's own economy. Thus the right, sovereign state power and democratic system of representation are far from sufficient to maintain the control of the multitude of objects on the one hand, and the control of the physical body of the state itself (not the representative one) on the other hand. Thus, the economic state interventions and their power technologies from the 17th century onwards must always be understood as a reaction to the growth of industrial production and the population, and vice versa.

The expenditure of state money, tax revenues and the public budget are decisive elements of a state sovereignty which, by means of its apparatuses, has taken over the financial administration and the disposition of public funds and thus created a quasi-autonomous field of intervention into which, however, particular interests seep from outside, which threaten the sovereignty of the state, especially since the state, when levying taxes, makes itself dependent on the property and income of others. This dependence is further intensified by the issuance of government bonds or by credit-based public financing, which is tied to financial capital. Thus the state treasury becomes a fictitious and abstract legal entity that marks out an instance of impersonal continuity – it is even spoken of as the soul of the state, but which the state sovereign can never take completely under his control because he has to levy taxes on insecure private entities, companies and households. This is where state sovereignty and the capitalist economy intertwine in a very peculiar way. (Cf. Vogl 2015: 76f.)

The triumvirate of the military, government bonds and tax collection must be seen as an important movement towards consolidating the capitalist state and its apparatuses, bearing in mind that the taxes and state debts that serve to secure state sovereignty are also pinching the state. If, according to a common definition such as Carl Schmitt, only the sovereign can decide on the state of emergency, then actors (financiers) and mechanisms (public debt and taxes) are needed to make this decision possible. Conversely, public debt drives capital accumulation and private wealth accumulation. With the interdependence of taxes, public credit and public debt, a diagrammatic, strategic and political-economic field of power or apparatus was established early in the history of capitalism that testifies to a specific interplay of state and capital (in contrast to the relative autonomy of the state vis-à-vis capital). Within this field, a "seigniorial power" developed from the 17th century onwards (ibid: 69f.), with which various capital fractions succeeded, in a certain independence from juridical sovereignty, parliaments, the executive branch and the technologies of the administrative state apparatuses, in creeping themselves into and establishing themselves in the political-economic field, a field whose cohesive forces were characterized from the outset by diffuse, unstable and informal constellations of forces between state and capital. Joseph Vogl speaks of diagrammatic arrangements in which heterogeneous units, informal balances of power, and strategic policies are mixed, although condensations and fusions occur again and again, and thus fragile structures of unification, however they may be, are created.<sup>9</sup>

5) The informal connection between state structures and private capitalization is gradually strengthening, enabling stable infrastructures to be created for the movement of money and capital and at the same time strengthening the credit system, which in turn enables extensive trade in fictitious capital. With the processes of stabilizing public debt, taxation and credit, which have established the economic state, another sovereign power has emerged in the various monetary and fiscal affairs that is beyond the direct control of the state, namely the central or central bank. At the same time, however, the central bank is developing an even greater intensity of interdependence and organizational density between the private, state and transstate structures and institutions, at the systemic level (coordination of state government practices and the economy), at the technical level (orientation of monetary policy to capital) and finally at the personnel level. The central banks form the hinge for co-evolution between state structures and (financial) capital, as a result of which mutual dependencies intensify and at the same time a new specific type of para-state power emerges.

1 Relationships of power imply inequalities in the relationships of meaning and communication: While the ruling cadre constantly issues commands that show specific effects, the dominated one constantly recognizes the commands and forms of communication. Those who do not bow to the rules of the capitalist state in their behavior are classified in differentiated gradations and included or excluded, in the best case both.

2 This representation is not as far removed from a position as the feminist theorist Karen Barad, inspired by Derrida, formulated it: For them, apparatuses consist of specific arrangements based on folds, cuts and exclusions, that is, on material-discursive practices that generate the cohesion necessary for the apparatuses; the materialization and stabilization of phenomena that come about through intraactivity takes place in apparatuses, or to put it another way, apparatuses are the result of material-discursive practices, and these produce decisive differences by shaping both materials and meanings and thus producing phenomena of which they are a part. (Barad 2012: 31) A specific, material configuration thus takes place in the apparatuses, as far as the space and time matrices are concerned, which themselves are not to be understood statically, but require dynamic reconfigurations. However, it is precisely the concept of cohesion that needs to be concretised now, since material compression in apparatuses is more than merely an institutionalisation of intra-activities, because cohesion implies, on the one hand, a very specific strategic terrain on which political and economic conflicts and struggles are fought out (i.e. very specific intra-actions), and, on the other, specific apparatuses. Applied to the state, this would then mean that state apparatuses are specific material configurations of the world that are materialized by groups in struggles, whereby apparatuses are not to be understood in the sense of pure structures or instruments, but as material-discursive practices that are realized and solidified in specific arrangements. At this point Poulantzas follows on from the late Althusser and says that apparatuses are driven by energies arising from class struggles, while the apparatuses, conversely, also have an effect on class struggles and thus transform the energies once invested.

3 Bob Jessop has brought into play the concept of strategic selectivity against Offe, strongly following Poulantzas, which emphasizes more the relationship between state structures and the strategies of classes within specific power relations. (Jessop 2007)

4 Poulantzas distinguishes between the abstract-formal concept of the mode of production and the real-concrete concept of the relations of production/formation of society (which is decisive for the state).

5 Law is identified as the institutionalized form of state law or as a legal ideology or as an expression of a semblance hovering above production.

6 The value as the form of economic and social integration as well as the abstract unity principle of private labour products and the law as the abstract unity principle of independent private producers have here an immanent connection.

7 Among other things, the authors Hirsch/Kannankulam have pointed out in their extension of Poulantzas and the Formanalyse des Staates (Hirsch/Kannankulam 2006) that the legal forms are also to be found in institution

At this point, it is less a question of the problem of the relative separation of state and economy than of the fragile inner connection, however it may be, between state power and private capital accumulation, which demands a specific type of power. According to Vogl, this type of seigniorial power can be characterized by the following genealogical characteristics (ibid.: 69ff.) 1) Power refers to heterogeneous structures composed of legal regularities, private capital movements and state interventions, i.e. modes that converge and diverge in specific constellations, whereby the activation of state power cannot be completely separated from capital power. Under these meta-organizational aspects, state and economy are initially to be understood as equally original. 2) Fiscalism, which is characterized by taxes and public debt, drives the production of general wealth, while, conversely, it remains dependent on it. 3) The conversion of parts of state power into private capital power was characterized early on by the establishment of heterogeneous assemblages (Bank of England), in which legal rules, political interventions, economic infrastructures, and diverse capital strategies were integrated through the management of the sovereign debt system. With the transfer of state credit under the rule of private risk management, the speculative financing of private capital has been put on a permanent footing. 4) With the issuance of government bonds, the state increasingly submits to the power of private creditors, which leads to the increased triggering of credit cycles that are triggered by the capital market.

7 Among other things, the authors Hirsch/Kannankulam have pointed out in their extension of Poulantzas and the Formanalyse des Staates (Hirsch/Kannankulam2006) that legal forms must also be materialized in institutions that exhibit specific dynamics, regimentation and patterns and do not coincide with legal forms. Thus, material-discursive structural principles are inscribed in the institutions and can be understood as "modes of institutionalization" and specific points of application of condensation. How the structural determinations in capitalism look historically concrete depends in turn on the balance of power and struggles that help them to "express" themselves. The state "objectifies" the form definitions in a political form that must be justified on the basis of the economic form.

8 This is also shown today quite materially. Global logistics indicates the subordination of production under the conditions of circulation. In logistics, production is ultimately a moment in a continuous, heraclitic flow; the factory dissolves into a planetary stream, is divided into modular processes that can be combined and recombined at the global level according to the changing demands of capital. Modular systems solve the complexity problem by transforming information into a "black box" in which codes or information are divided into separate units. Supply chains and container ships are modular per se. In this way, logistics attempts to transform all fixed capital into circulating capital in order to approach even the purest and most liquid form of capital: Monetary capital.

9 For Deleuze, the diagram, which is always unstable and supported by informal forces, is a power function with which one can impose certain behaviors on certain materials. (Deleuze 1987: 51f.)

Translated with <http://www.DeepL.com/Translator>

Translated with <http://www.DeepL.com/Translator>

Translated with <http://www.DeepL.com/Translator>

← PREVIOUS   NEXT →

---

## META

CONTACT

FORCE-INC/MILLE PLATEAUX

IMPRESSUM

DATENSCHUTZERKLÄRUNG

## TAXONOMY

CATEGORIES

TAGS

AUTHORS

ALL INPUT

## SOCIAL

FACEBOOK

INSTAGRAM

TWITTER